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ABSTRACT

A review of the literature indicated a recognition that interview behavior was critical to job placement and successful employment. Previous research, however, has not specified either the structure of inverview training with the mildly retarded or the outcomes of those programs. In a recent study, 29 of 40 mentally retarded young adults filled the role of job interviewer to a moderately successful extent. This paper attempts to determine the relationship of this finding to subjects' cognitive and personality dimensions; and to subsequent employment. Thirty-four mentally retarded young adults with IQ scores from 42 to 85 served as subjects. They were minimally trained in questioning techniques and instructed to serve as job interviewers. The Ss Performance in the role of job interviewer was measured by summing the number of experimentor-suggested questions and the number of judged relevant questions they asked on their own initiative. On the basis of preliminary findings, the use of the interviewer role task with mantally retarded young adults appears worthy of future exploration as a promising technique to evaluate social skills, particularly in the job interview situation. Success with the interview task appears related to subsequent competitive employment. (Author/PC)

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Mentally Retarded Young Adults as Interviewers: Further Exploration of a Technique to Evaluate Social Skills

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Previous research has demonstrated the inadequate ability of the retarded to correctly decode and respond to relatively complex social situations (e.g., Edmonson et al., 1970; Tobias, 1969). Evaluative research by Bloom (1967), Gardner (1971) and Gold (1972) have concluded that the failure of educatable mentally retarded in competitive employment is primarily the result of social behavior deficits rather than job skill deficiencies. In response to this growing realization, Zisfein & Rosen (1972) developed a manual of group counseling techniques, principally involving role playing, to remediate social skill problems of the mildly retarded.

Review of the literature indicated a recognition that interview behavior was critical to job placement and successful employment. Previous work either has not specified the structure of interview training with the mildly retarded or the outcomes of those programs. In related work, Minkin et al. (1973) and Braukmann et al. (1974) report the enhancement of appropriate interview behavior in pre-delinquent populations. Recently, Sigelman & Werde- (1973) reported that mildly retarded young women in a transitional group home employed significantly more complex verbal responses to job interview questions than did a group of institutionalized residents.

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In a recent paper, James & Davis (1974) reported that 29 of 4 mentally retarded young adults filled the role of job interviewer to a moderately successful extent. The purpose of this paper was to determine the relationship of this finding to (1) subjects' cognitive and personality dimensions and (2) subsequent employment.

Method

Subjects

Thirty-four (34) mentally retarded young adults (twenty males and fourteen females) with an age range of fifteen to twenty-seven ($x = 18.3$) served as subjects for the study. Subjects' standard individual intelligence test scores ranged from 42 to 85 ($x = 63.2$). All the subjects were residents of a special rehabilitation halfway house program at a state supported school for the mentally retarded who worked either on the campus or at sheltered workshops in the community. In compliance with relevant ethical guidelines (Mental Retardation, 1973), informed consent was obtained from each subject by providing (1) an explanation of the purpose of the study (2) an opportunity for subjects not to participate without adverse consequences (two possible subjects choose not to participate) and (3) independent witnessing of subjects' permission to tape record conversations during the interview task.

Procedure

Following voluntary consent, subjects were asked to interview a person who was interested in working with young adults in a new project similar to the one in which the subjects were enrolled. Subjects were instructed to ask the person each of the following four questions: (1)

What is your name? (2) How old are you? (3) Are you married? and (4) Have you ever worked with young adults before? Subjects were reminded a second time to ask each of these four questions and were then encouraged to ask the person any additional questions which he/she felt would provide any other important information about the possible hiring of that person.

Following these instructions, subjects were asked to go into the adjoining room and conduct their interview. One half of the subjects interviewed a male "job applicant" and the other half a female "job applicant" in order to evaluate sex interaction effects on interviewee-interviewer dyads.

Two college undergraduates, one male and one female, were paid to fill the role of "job applicant." Both were trained by the experimenter to respond to subjects questions with brief answers and to avoid eliciting any further questions by their answers or comments. In addition, each of the applicants were provided a brief employment history to facilitate answering the questions about previous job experience with young adults.

Independent Measures

Cognitive functioning was measured by the individual subject's Full Scale, Verbal Scale and Performance Scale scores on the appropriate Weschler Intelligence test instrument. Personality functioning was measured by (1) subjects scores on the Comprehension and Picture Arrangement Subtests of the Weschler scale (previous work has reported a relationship between these scales and social competency; e.g., Krippner, 1964; Rapaport, 1945; Schafer, 1948 and Wechsler, 1958) and (2) five ratings of the social behavior of the subjects by their resident counselor. On items 27, 28, 51, 52 and 53 of the Behavioral Evaluation

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BE-1-b (TDMH-MR, 1972), a 65 item rating scale designed for use with state school residents. Subsequent employment of the subjects at six months into the half-way house rehabilitation projects was categorized by (a) not working off campus or sheltered workshop employment and (b) competitive employment.

Dependent Measures

Subjects' performance in the role of job interviewer was measured by summing the number of experimenter suggested questions and the number of judged relevant questions asked by the subject. Relationships of independent measures with the dependent measure were evaluated by computing Pearson product moment correlations.

Results

Summarizing the previous finding, 29 of 34 subjects asked the interviewee two suggested and one or more relevant questions, 11 asked three suggested and one or more relevant questions and 9 asked all four suggested plus one or more relevant questions. The female interviewee was asked more questions than the male interviewee by both male and female subjects. Total relevant questions asked by the subjects ranged from 0 to 16 with a median of 5.

Total relevant questions were correlated .35 with Full Scale scores, .01 with Verbal Scale scores and .37 with Performance Scale scores. Although the Full Scale and Performance Scale correlations with total relevant questions are significant at the $<.05$ level, they in fact account for a modest portion of the variance. Total relevant questions were cor-

related .35, .27, .36, .11 and .68 respectively with items 27, 28, 51, 52 and 53 of the Behavioral Evaluation form. Items 27 and 51 had statistically significant correlations with total relevant questions at the $< .05$ level, but also account for only a modest portion of the variance. In an attempt to evaluate the relationship of the interview task to subsequent employment, total relevant questions were categorized by the level of employment after six months of the project. The categorization was summarized in the following table:

	Not working or Sheltered Workshop	Competitive Employment
5 or more relevant questions	9	9
4 or less relevant questions	15	1

A χ^2 value of 8.11 was obtained for the above table which is significant beyond the $< .01$ level. Clearly, those subjects asking four or less relevant questions were most unlikely to be in competitive employment, while those asking five or more were equally divided between competitive and noncompetitive work placement.

Discussion

On the basis of these preliminary findings, the use of the interviewer role task with mentally retarded young adults appears worthy of future exploration as a promising technique to evaluate social skills - particularly in the job interview situation. The task is modestly correlated with cognitive functioning and with ratings of general behavioral functioning. More importantly, success with the interview task appears

related to subsequent competitive employment. Obviously, this finding requires replication with other populations as well as longer term follow-up of the present employment data. It is also possible that the concreteness of the task would provide a basis for rehabilitation of those clients initially unable to adequately fill the interviewer role.

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